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TAGS: [KPAQ](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KWMN](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: TWO JEDDAH-BASED SHURA COUNCIL MEMBERS COMMENT ON

REFORM, ISRAELI NUKES, AND IRAN

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Classified By: CG MARTIN R. QUINN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Charge's separate July 1 meetings with two Shura Council members in Jeddah, one a reform-oriented, U.S.-educated economist and the other a rather conventional thinking Arab foreign policy intellectual, presented an interesting contrast and a window into the personalities serving on the Council. The former was focused on the need for educational reform and said the Shura Council was on balance a positive force for change, though limited by a lack of professional staff. The latter saw Israel as entirely responsible for the failure to achieve Middle East peace and adamantly, if controversially, claimed that 80 percent of the Arab public welcomes Iranian nuclear efforts as a counter-force to Israel. While this flies in the face of government and elite opinion, we might want to keep this viewpoint in mind as we craft public diplomacy strategies to build support for containing Iranian influence in the region. End Summary.

KINGDOM MORE CONSERVATIVE THAN A GENERATION AGO

12. (C) According to Shura Council member Dr. Said al-Sheikh, in July 1 meeting with Charge (Ambassador Erdman), Saudi Arabia became more conservative after 1979 -- the year of the Iranian revolution and the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca -- but was now undergoing quiet, gradual, but real change. Al-Sheikh, a thoughtful chief economist at the National Commercial Bank with a doctorate from the University of Portland in Oregon, recalled an era when women in Saudi Arabia dressed more liberally, when cinemas were a normal part of life, and the presence of the religious police (Commission for the Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue) was more muted. Al-Sheikh was critical of Saudi public education, where Islamic religious instruction, has been more than 60 percent of the curriculum. While religion was an important component, al-Sheikh said, he favored a "broader educational platform" for students and praised King Abdullah's efforts in this regard.

SHURA COUNCIL: GROWING
ROLE BUT LIMITED RESOURCES

13. (C) According to al-Sheikh, the Shura Council remained consultative in nature but was playing a growing role. For

example, unlike at its inception 16 years ago, the Shura Council now had the ability to initiate action; it did not need to wait for the king or Council of Ministers to raise an issue. (Comment: The Governor of Mecca, Prince Khaled al-Faisal, told Charge July 14 that a gradual expansion of the Shura's role as a legislative body was not only welcomed by the king, but was part of his plan for modernizing the Kingdom. End Comment.)

¶4. (C) The Council, al-Sheikh added, faced difficulties with members living in far-flung cities throughout the Kingdom and with many -- like himself -- continuing to work in full-time, non-Council occupations. Attendance at weekly Shura Council sessions was usually far from 100 percent. The Council also lacked professional staff, and this in practice limited the ability of the Council to delve more deeply into issues and to expand the Council's purview. Asked what the Council's net impact was on reform, al-Sheikh said it was in fact a "mirror" of society, composed of academics, engineers, professionals, and religious scholars. On balance, it was a positive force for change and reform.

ISRAELI NUKES AND "HISTORICAL WRONGDOING"

¶5. (C) Shura Council member Dr. Sadaka Fadl, a professor at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah and a "foreign policy expert" on the Council, assessed Middle East peace issues in fairly conventional terms. Namely, Israel was entirely responsible for the lack of peace, the Arabs had gone the extra mile in embracing the Saudi-inspired Arab Peace Plan, further concessions from the Arab side were neither warranted nor possible, and it was to the United States to get Israel to accept this generous offer. Expressing "pain in his heart" for Israel's "historical wrongdoing," he nevertheless accepted the need for a two-state solution. But he rejected Charge's suggestion that all sides, including the Arabs, needed to take additional steps to create conditions for the early resumption of peace negotiations. He also had

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difficulty seeing the Arab Peace Plan as more than just a starting point and expressed deep concern for the "citizenship rights" of Arab citizens of Israel, whom he felt would face expulsion in the wake of a final agreement. On the nuclear issue, Sadaka asserted that Israel has deployed 200-300 nuclear weapons, noting that such weapons posed a threat to Arabs and could be "used" politically to blackmail and deter without ever actually launching them.

ARABS SUPPORT IRAN:
"DON'T BELIEVE WHAT PEOPLE TELL YOU"

¶6. (C) Raising his views on an Egyptian study, Fadl contended that 80 percent of Arabs support Iran in its pursuit of nuclear weaponry because the Islamic Republic is Israel's declared enemy. Fadl adamantly repeated the percentage: "Most people won't tell you the truth. I hope people are not just telling you what you want to hear. People want Iran to get the weapon so that they can confront Israel." Stopping short of stating that most Arabs think or hope Iran will actually use the weapon, Fadl was adamant that Iran's hard line towards Israel attracts wide support in the Arab world. Asked about the frequent negative attitudes of Saudis toward the Shi'a, he said: "Look, the Shi'a are Muslims. The Persians and the Arabs are not real enemies."

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The difference between the two Shura Council members is instructive, the one a thoughtful, U.S.-educated economist/technocrat who wanted to see gradual but real change, the other a more traditional, locally educated Arab intellectual willing to embrace a two-state solution but

still with a lot of baggage from the past. While we have no way of assessing from here the "Egyptian study" cited by Fadl, it is noteworthy that a leading intellectual and Shura Council member adamantly and repeatedly supports its conclusion that 80 percent of the Arab street welcomes Iran's nuclear effort as a counter-force to Israel. Needless to say, this flies in the face of official and elite opinion, which rightly views Iranian nuclear ambitions as a strategic threat to the Kingdom and the region. Since our occupational hazard is that we generally speak to elites and not the great, unwashed masses, we should at least keep Fadl's arguments in mind as we craft public diplomacy strategies for containing Iranian trouble-making in the region.

18. (U) Ambassador Erdman has cleared this cable.
QUINN